

To: Montana Senate Education and Cultural Resources Committee Membership
From: Deborah Rogala, Bitterroot Valley Community College Trustee-elect, and Chair
Re: SJ12, Bitterroot Valley community College Resolution

Dear Sirs and Madam,

I am unable to travel to Helena on Monday for the continued discussion of SJ12, and would ask that you consider my additional thoughts on this important matter.

As I listened last Wednesday to the thinly veiled attempts to discredit this grassroots community process by those *whose job it is to facilitate access to education for all Montanans*, I was struck once more by the discrepancies of the entire process.

The Bitterroot Valley did not choose the community college model without considerable research, discussion and thought. Given our efforts, we are genuinely distressed that OCHE and the BOR have done nothing other than tell us we just aren't able to dine with everyone else in the state at the table of accessible educational opportunity.

If OCHE and the Montana Board of Regents were truly doing their job, they, after having agreed to the need in the Bitterroot, would have set out to provide for those needs. By asserting simply that 'Montana cannot afford any additional institutions of higher education' without duly evaluating the existing system, they have sentenced the 36,000+citizens of the Bitterroot to continued lack of educational services, while they cast about for a 'new plan' for delivery of such.

Shame on the whole lot; if you total up the costs associated with 'fighting' the BVCC efforts by OCHE and the BOR, along with those of the UM in muddying the waters by initially offering to bring a new COT to Hamilton, subsequently changing that plan to a HEC, then running an expensive advertising campaign for their slim course offerings, we would have had the monies in hand which they claim are not 'available' for higher education in the state.

What good does it do our state to allow the powers that be to denigrate the voter's wishes? Why do those in the seat of power not take their mission to heart? Who exactly is benefiting from 'lack of educational opportunity' in the Bitterroot? These are questions I hope you ask yourself as you weigh in on this important decision.

The Montana legislature in its wisdom set forth the criteria for communities to service their educational needs; we have followed the statutes diligently, and instead of being assisted by those at the top, our efforts have endured unprecedented scrutiny, derision and criticism. Please do not let the 'higher education smokescreen' cloud your views on this historic precedent, listen instead to those who have done the work to create opportunity and prosperity for the Bitterroot, and to those who support equality for all Montanans.

Thank you for your consideration in this matter,
Deborah Rogala, BVCC Trustee-elect and Chair

